

The sound of success

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Duxbury High grad wins Emmy award

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As anyone who watched Sunday night's Primetime Emmy Awards knows, the NBC comedy "30 Rock" had a good night, taking the top comedy acting awards for stars Tina Fey and Alec Baldwin, winning the award for top comedy and snagging the prize for top writing for a comedy series.

But the show's haul actually started Sept. 13 at the Creative Arts Awards, held in the same Nokia Theatre in Los Angeles as a primetime awards ceremony, when the people responsible for making the show sound good — including a Duxbury High School graduate — took home a statuette for sound mixing on a half-hour comedy or drama series.

Griffin Richardson, 33, is the show's on-set mixer, responsible for recording all the dialogue, eliminating noise on the set and balancing the sound levels on the microphones. He was nominated in the same category last year, but did not win.

"It feels pretty surreal. The whole experience was overwhelming," he said. "Words kind of fail me making sense of what happened. It's hard not to stare at it and just not start laughing."

Richardson's path to an Emmy started in film school at New York University when a class in sound was available.

"I thought maybe it would be a fun thing that I happened to be interested in," he said. "It made sense to me in a way that a lot of other things didn't make sense."

In New York, Richardson said, people are always looking for interns and production assistants, and a friend introduced him to a sound mixer who needed someone to work free for three days. Later, he got a gig as a boom operator for the movie "Wet Hot American Summer."

"It's all word of mouth," he said. "Once people like you and think you do a good job, they call you back."

On the "Wet Hot American Summer" set, he hit it off with the director and a couple cast members, including Michael Ian Black. When they landed on Comedy Central in 2005 with the show "Stella," Richardson got a job as a sound mixer.

"I had never done a TV show before," he said.

"Stella" only ran for 10 episodes, but when one of its producers, Jerry Kupfer, got a chance to shoot the "30 Rock" plot, he brought Richardson on as a sound mixer.

"I got incredibly lucky in this job," he said. "I've never enjoyed a job as much as I've enjoyed this one."

Richardson's wife Sarah Holden is also in the entertainment business. Holden is a costume designer whose work will soon be featured in Neil LaBute's Broadway production of "Reasons to be Pretty."

"We met on a film set, so we did a handful of jobs together," he said.

According to Richardson, sound mixing can be a stressful job because usually the only people who care about how things sound are him and the two people who work for him, while everyone else worries about how things look.

However, he said, Baldwin is different.

"I've never met an actor who cares more about keeping quiet and getting good sound," he said.

Working with Baldwin every day, Richardson said it is hard to believe he had ever been a serious actor.

"He just has this instinct for what's funny," he said.

That is a trait Richardson said applies to the rest of the cast, including Fey. He said the "30 Rock" set is like going to school for comedy.

"She's one of the smartest people I've ever met," he said. "Just seeing them writing scenes on the fly ... their minds are incredibly fast. You can see things change from rehearsal to rehearsal and take to take."

Fey is not only the star of "30 Rock," but also created the show, serves as executive producer and writes. Richardson said she also leads by example.

"When the boss sort of sets the tone and is that nice and works that hard, no one can get away with being a pain in the (rear)," he said.

And yes, Richardson said it didn't take long for people to recognize Fey's resemblance to a certain Alaska governor and Republican vice-presidential candidate.

"The minute this (Sarah) Palin person became a reality, she was bombarded with calls," he said. While in Los Angeles, Richardson did not have a lot of time to celebrate his Emmy.

"I actually had to fly home the next day because I had to be to work Monday," he said. "We were still shooting."

However, he was able to attend a dinner after the ceremony.

"It's kind of like being at the biggest wedding ever," he said.

When Richardson got back to work, he said he got a standing ovation from the crew, followed by sarcastic comments.

Because of the Emmys, Richardson had this week off, but he said a normal day is 12 to 13 hours, usually starting at 7 a.m. or so on Monday. Because union rules mandate 10 hours off between shifts, the work gets later as the week goes on if shoots run long.

"It hasn't been so bad on '30 Rock' for the most part, but a lot of movie shoots tend to go long," he said.

The new season of "30 Rock" begins Thursday, Oct. 30, at 9:30 p.m. Of the 22 episodes this season, Richardson said four or five have already been recorded, with each shoot lasting five days. The way the schedule works, they shoot four or five weeks in a row, then take a week off.

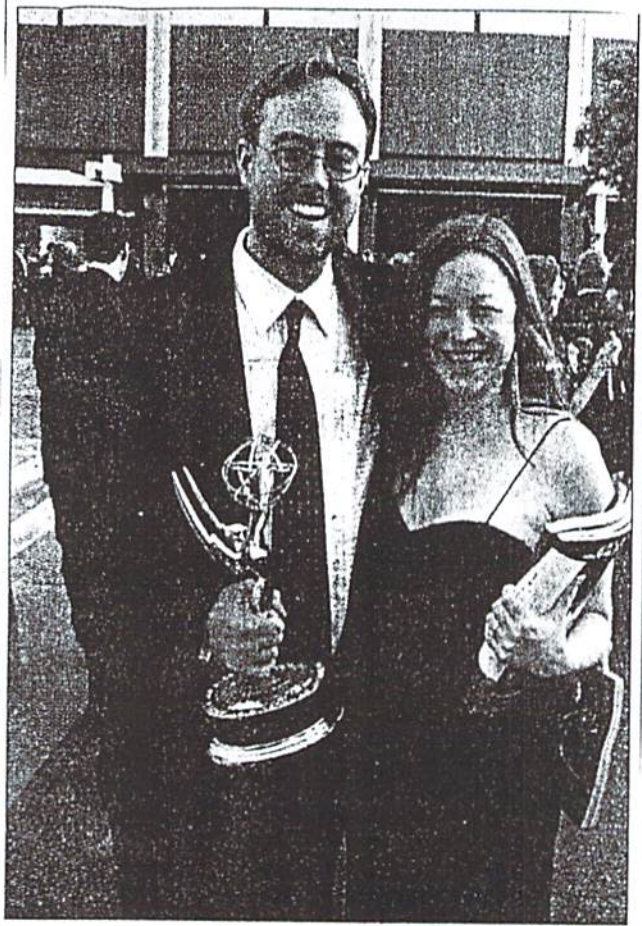
"I think we're done in the middle of March," he said. "I think I see the people at '30 Rock' more than I see my wife."

After the season ends, Richardson hopes to find work over the summer. He said a lot of projects fell through last year, but he usually does one or two movies during his time away from the show.

"It would be nice to be able to take the whole summer off, but I can't afford it," he said.

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Griffin Richardson



COURTESY PHOTO

Griffin Richardson with his wife, costume designer Sarah Holden, after receiving his Emmy for sound mixing on the show "30 Rock."